



Photos by Airman 1st Class Stephen Collier

The Oscura range makes use of a manned control tower to montior incoming aircraft.

Bombs away!

Ranges prepare pilots for war



by Airman 1st Class
Stephen Collier
49th Fighter Wing Public Affairs

They’ve been dubbed out of sight and out of mind by those who are tasked with the mission of upkeeping them. Ranging from the simplest of targeting ranges to fully-electronic scoring areas, bombing ranges play a vital part in keeping the pilots of the 49th Fighter Wing and the German Air Force one step ahead of their adversaries.

The 49th Operations Sup-

port Squadron’s Holloman range control office has been given the duty of keeping these ranges updated and in premier condition. Mr. Gary Atwell, 49th OSS assistant range manager, said the base’s bombing ranges have one simple mission – to give aircrews realistic training scenarios to prepare them for war.

“We have the best tactical ranges in Air Combat Command,” Mr. Atwell said. “Many pilots from each of the different service branches have come



A helicopter sits on the Oscura bombing range. Retired aircraft are used frequently for German Tornado crews to strafe.

to me and commented on them positively.”

Holloman makes use of five ranges that provide different training for pilots. Used significantly by beginner pilots in the GAF, the Oscura bombing range leads aircrews in by a five-mile long lead-in line that directs the pilots to the range where they use their two 27 mm cannons for strafing training.

Other ranges include the latest in ACC, the Centennial range, where electronic scoring gives the range control office the ability to score a pilot’s simulated bomb drop from over 50 miles away back at base. Mr. Atwell said this was important for scoring aircrews.

“With electronic scoring, we can automatically grade and evaluate a pilot’s bomb drop at the Centennial range,” he said. “This allows us to give aircrews instant feedback on what they need or not need to improve on.”

The Red Rio range, labeled a class C range because of its unmanned scoring, gives pilots a full, tactical bombing range for live drops of any of the Nighthawk’s ordinance. The final two ranges, McGregor and Casa ranges, are used for acquisition purposes exclusively.

Mr. Atwell added that the Red Rio range has significantly improved the training that impacts aircrews.

“The bombing ranges are one of those things that are important for training our aircrews to go to war but they can very easily be overlooked because people don’t see them,” he said. “People need to know that before our pilots can engage an enemy anywhere, they are trained to drop bombs on target, on time right here at Holloman.”



A formation of F-117A Nighthawks flies over Centennial range. The range is located 50 miles to the east of base on the Fort Bliss Reservation.



The Oscura bombing range entrance displays a anti-aircraft gun next to the range’s sign. The range is located on the Wsite Sands Missile Range and is accessible past Tulie Peak on base.



The Centenniel range makes use of retired aircraft for targets.



A F-106 is strapped down while being transported to Oscura.